

## Evaluative vs. Descriptive Language

Knowing the difference between evaluative and descriptive language can help you best approach discussions with students about uncivil classroom behavior. Evaluative, or judgmental, language causes defensiveness by passing judgment on the person and making the person the focus of the problem. In contrast, descriptive language focuses on the problem as separate from the person. Descriptive language focuses on the speaker's perceptions and is often called the "I" language.

According to Cangelosi (2013), "Research studies indicate that students feel less threatened, less defensive, and more willing to engage in learning activities when working with teachers who consistently use descriptive language than they feel when working with teachers who use a judgmental language style (Van Horn, 1982). *Descriptive language* verbally portrays a situation, a behavior, an achievement, or a feeling. *Judgmental language* verbally summarizes an evaluation of a behavior, achievement, or person with a characterization or label. Judgmental language that focuses on personalities is particularly detrimental to a climate of cooperation (Ginott, 1972)" (p. 95).